Multiple rejections in spoken French and spoken German. A contrastive study in oral performance styles

Introduction

There is a long tradition of research on French and German style, but this tradition is mostly concerned with written language, and certainly not with the conversational style of the average speaker of French or German, but rather with that of intellectuals and other public figures. The question of whether there are stylistic traditions that differ between Germans and French, and which are relevant in the language performance of people who are not particularly used to, or even trained, to perform in public, is therefore not easily answered. In research on grammar, it is often believed that spoken languages show more similarities than their written counterparts, since the culture-specific norms that may be imposed and enforced on the languages ‘from above’ are less likely to be followed in speaking than in writing. Therefore, oral language is believed to reflect the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ structure of the language more accurately than written language with its artificial ‘distortions’ and ad-hoc norms, which have partly been formed by puristic notions of what a logical language should look like (cf. Auer 2004). One way of approaching oral (everyday) and written (formal) styles would be to assume, along the same line of reasoning, that the stylistics of the former are more ‘natural’ than those of the latter. They would respond to the same (partly universal) exigencies of talk-in-interaction in similar ways, so that oral styles across languages would be more similar than written styles. Another way of approaching oral style would be to pursue a kind of trickle-

down model (cf. Hans Naumann’s gesunkenes Kulturgut ‘sunken culture’; Naumann 1922); accordingly, one would expect attenuated and perhaps also distorted reflexes of high culture norms in the language behaviour of the uneducated or less educated classes. Finally, it is possible that oral languages have developed counter-styles or sub-cultural styles that have their own tradition and are time-honored reflexes of a non-official culture which has always been a subcurrent and therefore independent of the official, written ones and their standardizations.¹ We are not claiming that any of these positions is the right one (and indeed, not even that one and the same answer holds for France and Germany), but rather believe that an answer to questions such as the ones raised here can only be found on the basis of a large body of empirical research, which we currently do not have at our disposal.

We are well aware of the problems that generalized claims about differences between ‘the’ French and ‘the’ Germans run into. Both the French and (perhaps even more) the German speech community are far from monolithic and show considerable internal variation. There is no reason to believe that this should hold for stylistics less than for grammar. In fact, our aim is considerably less ambitious and restricted to the speech of a certain group of speakers in a well-circumscribed situation. The data we will compare are all taken from interviews with average French and German speakers of a middle to advanced age (around 60), who have no academic training and who are not used to speaking in public. In the German case, they were recorded in the framework of a project on intonational differences in the large urban vernaculars of Germany, in the French case within a bi-national project on migrant oral history.²

The data were informal in the sense that there was no questionnaire and the interviewers asked open questions, participants engaged in exchanges other than question-answer sequences, and topics were pursued as long as they were of interest to both participants. They were formal in the sense that the interviewer and the interviewee knew each other only superficially or not at all, the interviewer was responsible for asking questions and the interviewee provided information about his or her life (life stories played an important part), and the interviewees were considerably older than the interviewers (the latter being around 30).¹ With regard to the three approaches to oral styles outlined above, it is obvious that the interview situation makes a certain amount of dependence of these speakers’ styles on the official styles of the respective culture more likely than other speech activities would.

Speech exchange systems such as conversational interviews (as one could call this hybrid genre) invite longer contributions by the interviewee in which s/he tells stories about life in the old times in general, and his or her life history in particular. These stories may have been told before, and they can be expected to exhibit features of a linguistic performance (more than, say, conversation over dinner among a couple).² By this we mean that through an auto-reflexive monitoring of the way in which the stories are told, the formal delivery of the information becomes subject to evaluation, beyond the contents of what was being said. Performances invite an audience’s attention to their form, and they invite evaluating it as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, according to form-related criteria. In our case, it is the interviewer (and perhaps even the putative listeners of the tape-recording) that assume the role of the audience evaluating the performance.

Style is, of course, an elusive concept, and a general description of stylistic differences as being more or less performance oriented is of little use as long as it cannot be shown that there are stable linguistic parameters that constitute this style. For this paper, we have singled out one specific phenomenon, which is tied to one of the basic operations of spoken syntax, i.e. retraction.³ In a retraction, a paradigmatic slot in an emergent syntactic unit is used twice, i.e. in formulating a next verbal component, the speaker re-uses a syntactic position which has already been filled by some other element before, and puts another element in this position. Retractions thus are characterised by a peculiar combination of forward- and backward looking formal features: something new is formulated by re-using something old. Syntactically speaking, retraction is the basis of repair, but not all retractions do repair work, let alone correct a previous item. Retraction is also the basis of list construction, and it is used for numerous other, non-

¹. The two cases cited from already published corpora (Ludwig 1988 and Blanche-Benveniste 1990) are carefully chosen for representing the same setting.
². Cf. Auer 1999, ch. 7 on the notion of performance used here. It should not be confused with performativity in the sense of Austin or Butler.
³. For further details on basic operations of spoken syntax, see Auer (2000, 2005, 2006).
repair functions, as we shall see below. While retractions are so basic to oral syntax that they occur in abundance in all our data, German or French, we will restrict our attention here even further to multiple retractions, i.e. to cases in which the same paradigmatic slot is used at least three times, or re-used at least twice. The quantity and quality of these multiple retractions is, so we claim, an important stylistic feature which differentiates German and French performance styles.

1. The structure of multiple retractions

Here is an example for a double retraction:


((The interviewer—S—just asked Madame Marco—MM—about her and her husband’s relationship to the sea))

MM: mais nous sommes des gens, (-)

but we are people
qui aiment la mer; (0.5)
who love the sea
pour le paysage qu’elle nous offre,
for the landscape it offers us

S: mmh

MM: pour tout ce qu’elle nous apporte en bruit,

for everything it offers us in terms of sounds
en en odeur, (0.5) euh:

of of smells uh
pour s’y baigner, (1.0)
for taking a bath in

mais: on n’aime pas aller sur les bat(h)eaux.

but we don’t like to go by boat

It is easy to see that through the repetition of the highlighted pour-phrase, the speaker creates some kind of orderliness in her contribution. How this is done can be better seen if we replace the conversation analytic transcript by a more structural, grille-inspired one:

The speaker produces a complete syntactic structure (nous sommes des gens qui aiment la mer) to which she attaches a continuation in the form of a causal prepositional phrase introduced by pour (pour le paysage) and expanded by a relative clause (qu’elle nous offre). Again, a syntactic completion point is reached. But instead of finishing her contribution at this point, the speaker re-uses the paradigmatic slot created by the prepositional phrase and formulates another causal prepositional phrase introduced by the same preposition and structured very similarly (the noun following the preposition is, in this case, a quantifying pronoun—tout—which is once more expanded by a relative clause: ce qu’elle nous apporte en bruit), i.e. she retracts to the position of the preposition and “starts again” at this point. Another possible syntactic completion is reached now. After a subordinate retraction internal to the main retraction (en bruit en odeur), the speaker retracts a second time to the paradigmatic slot established by the first and second prepositional phrase and re-uses it a third time. This time, she puts into this slot the same preposition pour but the preposition is now followed by an infinitival clause. (More about this shift from Prep + NP to Prep + S later.)

Example (1) presents a prototypical version of a double retraction. However, there are various variants which can be described as follows:

(a) the double retraction may operate with or without an anchor. An anchor is the word to which the speaker retreats and on which s/he restarts her contribution. In ex. (1), the anchor is the preposition pour. The anchor marks the paradigmatic slot in which the retraction is produced. However, retractions can occur without an anchor. Take, for instance, the following German example:
of the indefinite noun phrases. In an example (found on vol. 3, p. 610-611),
the ungrammatical use of the pronoun "there," which is not present in the
original sentence, is a cue for the listener to infer the existence of an
underlying constituent structure. The sentence "I don't know how many
there are..." is an example of this.

In the next clause, the sentence begins with the phrase "in this case,"
indicating the start of a new topic. The speaker then continues with a
more schematic representation of the ongoing conversation.

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In a more schematic representation, we can express the argument as
follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>that they don't like the food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>found</td>
<td>the conversations were problematic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>decided</td>
<td>to create a new one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The following example is from the book "The Syntax of English"
(Heinemann, 1973): "I asked my friend if he could find the book he
was looking for."
is achieved in the following example by a double reference:

*...* (1) and the *interrogative case* (and in all cases the "related" one) in each sentence, since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here. Since they are always of the same semantic category as *he* here.
The slot of the object noun phrase is re-used twice here, and the emerging list contains two elements from the same semantic category (that of collectibles) and a list-filler.

2. The structure and functions of retractions in German

After this short overview of the structure of multiple retractions, we now turn to differences between the German and the French data. The German interview data contain many examples of retractions constituting lists (such as in example 5), and of retractions marking hesitations (such as in example 4). We also find examples in which the retraction serves to integrate parenthetical comments paralleling the French example 3:

Ex (6): (topic is I's new house)

I: .h wir ham jetza SCHÔne: ( ) SCHÔne:-
we now have beautiful beautiful
müssen=> ma kommen ANschaun;
you have to come and see
.h also Schône: ( ) TÜren drin,
well beautiful doors in the house
also wenn=se mal ZEIT ham am vormittag (...)
so if you have time one morning (...)

The retraction sets in before a syntactic completion point, and before the rhyme of the utterance has been produced. The first retraction on the adjective schön may be a forward marker for the inserted parenthetical remark which is produced between the first and the second retraction. The second retraction resumes the superordinated sentence after the parenthetical comment is over.

Examples of double retractions such as in (1) are rare, however. One of the few German examples which at first sight appear to be similar to the structure of the French example (1) is the following:

Ex. (07):

MU05: des WIChtigste bei eire haustür is (0.78)
the most important thing for your front door is
dass sie auch a tür is die ma net AUSheben kann.
that it is umh a door which you can't lift out of the frame
die also mehre (0.49) [ah (0.26) verBINDungen ( )
which has more than one I mean umh links ( )
I: [SICHerheits
safety

MU05: und dass der stock au richtich bFEStigt [is
and that the door frame is fastened properly
I: [mh

MU05: richtich stark verSCHRAUBT [is
is screwed in very tightly
I: [mm

The grille representation shows, however, that in a strict understanding of double retractions, the speaker never realises this format:
The example shows an amount of "fuzziness" which is typical of German multiple retractions whose structure often is not easy to see. However, the grid representation makes it clear that what appears to be a case of double retraction at closer inspection turns out to be a collection of binary structures (simple retractions) which are nested into each other.

In structural terms, it is of some interest that German multiple retractions do not necessarily imply the use of an anchor. Consider the following list construction:

Ex. (8): (interview with a former railway employee)

RE: so ham se also mit ALlem zu tun=so
then you have something to do with everything
mit persoNAL,
with staff
mit EINstellung,
with recruitment
und entLASSungen,
and redundancies

I: [hm]

RE: [wie] also mit der konTROLle .h ah: des ZUGverkehrs,
as with the regulation uhm of the train circulation
mit aufstellen von FAHRplänen,
with the setting up of time tables
un: d dergleichen;
and so on
und überWACHung des verkEhrs
and the supervision of the traffic

The interviewee, a former railway employee, uses various retractions. In the first part of his contribution, he begins with a generalised description of his duties by stating that one had to do with everything at the railways. After that, the noun phrase mit allem is further specified by a list, the first two elements of which copy the preposition mit ("with") which had been used in the introductory generalised description. The last list element (Entlassungen), however, is added without a retraction to the anchor preposition:

so ham se also
therefore you have sth. to do
mit Allern
with everything
mit persoNAL
with staff
mit Einstellungen
with recruitment
und entlassungen
and redundancies
zu tun=so

In the second part of the turn, the speaker switches to another list construction, again based on the already established pattern of a preposition (mit) & (complex) noun phrase. In semantic terms, it is a continuation of the previous list, with more elements now added from the domain "railway":

mit der konTROLle . h ah: des ZUGverkehrs,
the regulation uhm of the train circulation
mit aufstellen von FAHRplänen,
setting up of time tables
dergleichen;
so on
überWACHung des verkEhrs
supervision of traffic

As before, the components of the list do not follow exactly the same pattern. While the first and second phrase start with the preposition mit, the list filler in the third position of the list has no anchor, and neither does the repair-like addition of the fourth list item (supervision of traffic). The example shows, then, on the one hand, that list construction is a particularly frequent function of retractions in German, but also, on the other hand, that retractions in German are highly variable in their structure, and are often not, strictly speaking, a form of parallelism. The non-use of an anchor in some of the cases contributes to this picture.
In addition to lists, German speakers use multiple retraction in the context of simultaneous speech. As is well-known from previous research, repetitions of items are a frequently employed technique to ward off interruptions and hold the floor in competitive environments. An example is the following:

Ex. (g): (conversation is again about I's new house and the security doors that have been fitted in the front)

I: und dann äh
and then um
MUA: [aber dann brAucht=s a=
yes then you of course need
=von hinten her brAucht=s ja A
from the backside you of course need
I: [i glaub da bricht ma dann bei uns
I think somebody would have an easier time
leichter dann durchs TVer[durch] breaking into our house through the wall
MUA: [ja ja [NA aber
yes yes no but
[von HINten her (o.2) braucht=s a geNAUs so äh [siche tÜrn.
from the backside you of course need equally secure doors
I: [<<cpp>als ( )>>]
ja KLAR,
yes of course

The retraction starts before the rhematic component (that equally safe doors are needed in the back, in addition to the front door). In the first retraction, an element is inserted in front of the verb (von hinten her), in the second, the construction is brought to an end by adding the rhematic component genauso sichere Türen. Withholding the rhematic part of the utterance, and thus arguably the most central part of the speaker's statement, is obviously linked to the turn-taking problems surrounding this utterance. While speaker MUA is about to formulate his slightly critical remark that front door security is useless unless the backdoors are secured as well, the owner of the house wants to bring home her hyperbolic praise of the front door (which is so secure that burglars would have a better chance of breaking in through a stone wall than opening the door by force). This remark is clearly positioned competitively, interrupting MUA's emergent construction. The competitive nature of this stretch of talk is underlined by MUA's acknowledgement of I's joking remark in the first retraction (which is introduced by "yes yes no but").

In sum, German double retractions are mostly used for marking hesitancy, for list constructions and for securing speakership in turn-taking turmoils. They are often composed in a way that avoids strict parallelism, for instance by alternating between retractions with and without anchors.

3. Retractions in French

What are the similarities and what are the differences between French and German double retractions? In French, retractions occur before and after a syntactic closure just as in German. However, we observe differences both in form and in function in our data.

3.1. Symmetry in form

The French data show a tendency to achieve parallelism in multiple retractions. An important evidence for this tendency is found in the consequent use of an anchor (often a preposition, a determiner or a relative pronoun). A first type of retraction in French, which is illustrated in examples 10, 11 and 12, often seems to be related to hesitations or lexical access problems and is as widespread in French as it is in German. Let us first consider the following case of a double retraction of the incremental type.

(10) Poli 2006, 424-426

DP: elle a trouvé du travail à la
she got a job at the
à la gare de:
the station
à la gare de charles de marseille [= la gare de Saint-Charles]
at the charles station in marseille
elle a trouvé du travail
a la gare de:
a la gare de charles de marseille

In this case, the retraction occurs before a turn unit closure, i.e. within a sentence before the rheme, which is only reached in the last line. What is striking in this example is the consequent repetition of the prepositional anchor à. This persistent use of an anchor is not restricted to double retractions (ex. 10), but can also be found in multiple retractions; cf. the following extract of an interview with an army officer who talks about the history of Patagonia. The interviewer asked the older man about initiatives aiming to maintain Patagonian identity. The interviewee underlines the importance of one of these initiatives by a certain John Ross:

(11) (Blanche-Benveniste 1990: 28, 244, 246)

il faut euh
we have to
sauter des des initiatives comme celle de de John Ross
greet the initiatives like the one of John Ross
avec beaucoup de cœur et avec beaucoup de euh de de
with a lot of commitment and with a lot of
comment dire avec euh
how should I say
avec beaucoup de d’envie de de de vivre des situations
with a lot of eagerness to live situations [that are]
assez rarissimes euh dans notre dans notre époque
quite extraordinary in our epoch

In this example, a syntactic closure would be possible after avec beaucoup de cœur, but this possibility is not made use of, as the following expansion shows. The actual turn completion is reached only after several retractions. All the retractions go back to the prepositional anchor de, whose syntactic function changes, however. First, de is meant to introduce the nominal complement of beaucoup, later on, it introduces the infinitival complement of envie de.

A frequently used anchor is the relativizer, as in the following case:

(12) cil_fra_zürbig_s1o (about a king who has a close relationship to his land)

c’était un roi qui était né au maroc ()
he was a king who was born in Morocco
qui a été élevé () qui a été élevé au maroc ()
who was brought up in Morocco
qui faisait ses études au maroc ()
who studied in Morocco
qui a tout fait au maroc quoi ()
who did everything in Morocco
of a picture on the left is similar to the right of a picture on the right is similar to the left.

The second preposition introduces a noun (le paysage) which is

In both sentences, the relative pronoun qui is the subject of

Recall the following criteria of example (12):

always the same subject, the preposition, and the noun.

whenever the second preposition is only formal.

When the prepositions are used in context, the functions of the prepositions remain.

While French shares the main functions of prepositions with other languages, they are expressed differently in context.
which is specified by a relative clause. Semantically, both constructions are quite parallel, too, since both express a causal relationship. In the second retraction, however, pour is no longer used as a preposition, but as a conjunction introducing an infinitival clause. Not only is the syntactic function of pour different between the first and the second retraction; the semantic (or logic) relation expressed in the second retraction is one of finality rather than causality.¹

The same holds for the following example in which the anchor does not have the same syntactic function:

Ex. (14): (on French colonialism in the 17th century)

O:  
   c'était
   it was
   c'était le protectorat de toute façon ()
   it was in any case the "protectorat"
   (en)fin
   I mean
   c'était
   it was
   c'était l'époque du colonialisme quoi
   this was the time of colonialism you know
   tous les pays cherchaient la richesse un peu partout quoi
   all countries were looking for wealth almost everywhere you know
   bon
   well
   et lui il a signé
   and he signed
   bof
   all the same
   c'était aux français de prendre le contrôle de tout quoi ()
   the French had to start ruling over everything you know

\[\text{FIRST RETRACTION} \quad \text{(en)fin} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{SECOND RETRACTION} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{QUI} \quad \text{QUI} \]

¹. We are well aware of the fact that these two semantic relations have been interpreted as two sides of the same coin. Cf. Raible (1992) on both uses of pour.

Here, c'était opens an equative copula construction in the beginning (c'était le protectorat) and also in the first retraction, but it expresses deontic modality in the second retraction (c'est à X de faire Y). In spite of the hesitation signals (enfin, bon, bof), the utterance sounds well-formed, although its semantic and syntactic cohesion is only superficial.

The same holds—now on a more textual level—for the following case:

(15) ci_caban_jean_d_2006_787_792 (introducing a friend who is priest)

D: je parle d’un ami curé que j’avais?
   I’m talking about a friend of mine who is priest (that I had)
   qui a prêché à budapest
   who preached in Budapest
   qui a prêché () à perpignan
   who preached in Perpignan
   qui a prêché ()
   who preached
   qui était en conflit avec son évêque?
   who was in conflict with his bishop

B: hmm

D: parce que lui était directeur de la (croix de la de tarne)
   because he was director of the Croix de la Tarne
   et il était en conflit avec monseigneur
   and he was in conflict with the priest (bishop)

In a grille-version:

D: je parle d’un ami curé
   que j’avais?

| qui a prêché à budapest |
| qui a prêché () à perpignan |
| qui a prêché () |
| qui était en conflit avec son évêque ? |

The conflict between the priest and the bishop is presented in the same way as all the elements of the priest’s curriculum vitae given just before. Thus, semantically non-parallel elements of the turn are formally parallelized, which clearly goes beyond the function of rhetorical parallelism known as the “iconic signalizing of functional equivalence” (Atayan 2000: 289).
This type of rhetorical use of multiple retraction can also be observed in the next example, where a concessive construction is hidden under the parallelism:

Ex. (16):  cil_caban_2006_jean_d_597-601 (D. is answering the interviewer’s question whether ‘all’ of his brothers were great singers)

B: vous savez donc tous chanter
all of you thus were good singers
D: il y en a qu’un de euh f (-)
there is one among us
un de n de=n de nous cinq
among the five of us
mon frère francis qui ne s (-)
my brother Francis who didn’t kn(ow how to sing)
qui qui avait la voix juste mais qui:
who who had the voice just right but who
qui chantonnait quoi (-)
who could not sing loud enough, right?

In the grille-version we get:

B: vous savez donc tous chanter
D: il y en a qu’un de euh f (-)
un de n de=n de nous cinq
mon frère francis
qui ne s (-)
qui qui avait la voix juste mais qui:
qui chantonnait quoi (-)

Here, the interviewer suggests that all the five brothers were talented musicians, who were especially good at singing (the ‘X’ of the cardinal concessive pattern of Barth-Weingarten 2003, Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2000). The interviewee then acknowledges this X by giving an X’ (qui avait la voix juste), but contradicts the overall assumption by telling that one of the five was not able to sing accurately nor loud enough (Y: qui chantonnait quoi).

In sum, double or multiple retractions in French may help to create the impression of a strong cohesion of an emerging complex argumentation even though the semantic or syntactic coherence is only weak.

Conclusion

French and German speakers are not so different in their use of double retractions in emergent syntactic projects in semi-formal interactive genres such as interviews. This is not surprising, given the expectation mentioned above that languages are more similar in their spoken form than in their written version since the former lacks the normative pressure exerted on the latter. Both in the French and German data, multiple retractions occur before and after a syntactic completion point and before and after the theme. Despite this similarity in the overall strategy of emergent syntax, there seem to be major differences in form, frequency and function, all of them converging in a general hypothesis of a more stylistic-rhetoric function of retractions in French.

From a syntactic point of view, there is less variation in the French data which quite consequently use the technique of retracting to and repeating the preposition, determiner or relativizer/conjunction as an anchor. Not only is the same paradigmatic slot re-activated again and again (as in multiple retractions in general), the speaker also re-uses the same word of the retraction over and over again.

On the functional level, double retractions can be found in both languages in list constructions and as a display of hesitancy. But French speakers use retractions for organising their arguments much more than German speakers do, who on the other hand may use retractions for interactional purposes (such as dealing with simultaneous talk). It seems that complex arguments and even narratives are forced into the format of multiple retractions by the French speakers, as a kind of simplest structure-providing device which creates syntactic parallelisms and rhetorical effect even though the semantics of what is said may not render themselves easily to this kind of structuring.

In the introduction, we promised not to suggest far-reaching interpretations to our empirical findings. Thus, instead of giving answers, we would like to raise a new question at this point.

As early as 1961, Harald Weinrich showed that the discourse of the génie de la langue française is not based on expressivity or on tradition as other national language discourses are (cf. Eco 1993). Instead, the

1. For frequency differences between written French and written German, see Atayan 2006: 314.
core of the French discourse is clarté achieved by a well-structured syntactic order on the phrase level. In the same contribution, Weinrich argues that syntactic clarity in French syntax is ‘a myth’. This myth might have given rise to an ethos or even a virtue of well-structured writing. Could it be the case that the same holds for oral language? I.e., that speakers try to create—at least formal—cohesion, even at the cost of cheating syntactically?

What we can hint at in this context are some differences in the emergence of the “bon usage”, which in France, more than in Germany (Barbour & Stevenson 1998, 145-151) is defined not only in relation to written but also to oral language usage. Vaugelas, often cited as the father of the “bon usage”, not only mentioned the example of the good writers, but also “la manière de parler” of the best men and women at the Royal Court. The specific technique of double retraction may reflect a tradition of oral language performance in France which differs from the German one. In French more than in other European languages, the normative (standard) language developed in close relationship with oral traditions and conversational maxims (cf. Bader 1988), at least in its early phase (Ludwig 1996: 1494). Even grammars written for schools and universities tended to allude to the virtue of well-formed oral conversation in French (see among others Dauzat 1947: 353-4). Since the writings of Rivarol and Voltaire, clarity and ease of understanding have been associated with regularity before variation (Meschonnic 2000). Thus, what Sabio (2006) calls “ce rythme particulier” in French, might in fact be a performance style. In part this rhythm might by a reflection of the often postulated “facilité de construction qui se prêterait [...] à l’oreille” (Dictionnaire Général, cit. apud Saint-Gérard 2000: 43). The French retraction style then might be part of what Blanche-Benveniste & Bilger (2000) call the rhétorique fondamentale des locuteurs non-professionels in ordinary everyday French. This, however, is a claim that has to be substantiated by future research.

1. This argument could help to overcome the old binary (internal vs. external) approach to language change, as proposed very convincingly in Oesterreicher 2007.
2. For the term of “français ordinaire”, see Gadet 1997.

Appendix: Transcription conventions
(following GAT, cf. Selting et al. 1998)

Sequential structure

| ] | simultaneous talk |
| = | latching |
| ( ) | micropause |
| ( ) | brief pause (0.1 sec) |
| ( l ) | pause of one second |

Segmental transcription

| ; ; | elongation |
| : ; | glottal cut-off |
| so(h)o | laughter in talk |
| haha he he | laughter |
| prosody | primary (nuclear), secondary accent |
| akZENT, akZEnt | prosodic description of the passage in < > |
| ⩾ > | rising intonation (boundary tone) |
| ⩾ : | falling intonation (boundary tone) |
| others | para-/extralinguistic activities |
| ( ) | unintelligible |

Bibliographie

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Dislocation et conjugaison en français contemporain

On qualifie communément de « dislocations » (à droite ou à gauche) des dispositifs syntaxiques dans lesquels un argument du verbe est exprimé deux fois, par un pronom clitique et par un syntagme verbal détaché en périphérie. Voir par exemple [Blasco 1999 : 209] :

Dislocation : forme de construction dans laquelle au lieu d’un élément régis par le verbe (à mon fils dans Je parle à mon fils), on a d’une part un pronom qui assure la fonction de régis (lui dans Je lui parle) et d’autre part une réalisation lexicale disloquée, mon fils, soit avant le verbe (Mon fils je lui parle) soit après le verbe (Je lui parle à mon fils).

En général, le double marquage d’argument est considéré comme une propriété caractéristique des constructions disloquées, et on l’utilise comme critère pour les identifier. Autrement dit, il suffit qu’un énoncé contienne un double marquage pour qu’on lui attribue ipso facto une construction disloquée. C’est cette équivalence ou co-extensivité présumée des deux phénomènes que je voudrais remettre en cause ici. J’examinerai d’abord le cas des sujets, puis celui des régimes verbaux.

1. De la (non-)dislocation des sujets

1.1. Syntaxe

1.1.1. Parmi les énoncés qui présentent un double marquage du sujet (cooccurrence SN + il), on en trouve qui ne possèdent pas les propriétés ordinaires des constructions disloquées. Par exemple :

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<mon fils> meurt.  
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<some friends> meurt.